

GLOBAL

EXPRESS

Vol. 4, No. 3, 1999
ISSN 1325-2038



Acha!

Acha! This is the most brilliant Hindi word. It means OK. Understand. Cool. Truly a word for all seasons.

Freedom - is it free? At this moment, I am residing in a country boasting the largest democracy. But I'm not about to slip in a few comments on post-independent India and her 50 years of political freedom. I think that would be hazardous and against sensible inclinations. However, given no parameters in this editorial note on the subject matter, only one word comes to mind... contrasts.

Here, there is perfect order in complete chaos. Should you be bewildered, just take one glance at the traffic anywhere in India - you will see the amazing talent of people to drive on all sides of the road, cattle included! Perhaps I'm easily amused but is anyone fussed? Maybe they are, maybe they're not! I am in wonder, though, as I stare at the pockets of immense wealth alongside physical poverty. India claims to be highly developed whilst also highly backward. She holds onto the threads that sustain the ideal Indian life but carefully allows Western innovations to infiltrate. Multi-racial and multi-faith. She is a people of tolerance disrupted by sporadic religious intolerance. Caste systems are accepted and scorned. Good and bad. Change and stagnation.

She is not free from contradictions but she is an artisan's finest mosaic. There's a sense of beauty in balance and acceptance. But don't just take the puzzled observations of this tourist. "Live and let live," says Indian philosopher Swami Vivekananda of this great nation. Aaaachaaa!

Goretti Nguyen, Vietnam/Australia

Next issue: racism, reconciliation, any other ideas?
Deadline: May 30, 1999



Goretti (right) with Indian children

GLOBAL EXPRESS

seeks to:

- be an independent media service
- establish and support a global network
- be culturally inclusive
- respond to a rapidly changing world
- connect personal and global issues
- encourage personal integrity and responsible attitudes
- encourage people to act on creative inspiration

believing that:

- you matter
- you can make a difference
- goodness has an image problem and spirituality is marginalised
- sincere communication at every level is essential
- peace is possible if we face the causes of division and injustice in our own lives and communities
- time for reflection is essential to find direction

Why Global Express?

Global Express (GE) was started to link up young people who care about the future. Dissatisfied with what we were being offered by the media, we felt an alternative was needed.

Our aim is to inspire and encourage people to fulfil their potential. In GE you can question the way things are, and search for solutions. It is also a great opportunity to make contacts outside your "comfort zone".

Most of the GE team met through MRA (Moral Re-Armament), which is a worldwide network of people working for personal responsibility and conflict resolution. Absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, together with a search for inspiration from God, are central to this approach to life. MRA is a Non Government Organisation recognised by the United Nations. For more information visit: <http://www.mra.org.uk>

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Global Express goes to:

Africa: Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa; **Americas:** Brazil, Canada and USA; **Asia/Pacific:** Australia, Cambodia, Fiji, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and Western Samoa; **Europe:** Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Russia, Scandinavia, Serbia, Switzerland, UK and Ukraine; **Middle East:** Lebanon and Palestine.



What you said about the *Passion* issue...

Ailsa Hamilton, Scotland: "A wonderful issue, full of heartening and challenging things. The cover is stunning."

Deepak Ajwani, India: "Let me congratulate you on the content and the layout. Splendid amount of work and colourful experiences of various people."

Dr James Derrick, England: "I like the approach of your excellent magazine and wish it well. I wonder, however, just how much you can achieve without giving the prime reason for 'no sex before marriage' which is that 'God says so'."

Signe Strong, Sweden: "I believe many feel the 'freedom' of sex unbearable at heart, and I do think that a change could be on the way as a result of all the unhappiness and insecurity free sex has caused. But it needs to be taught, discussed, experiences shared, hope and vision given. Sex is so much part of everything, when you think of the creative power it represents! If people could only realise that the opposite to sexual freedom is not negative, but a tremendous positive!"

James Trevelyan, England: "I liked everything except 'Eight Ways To Be Sensible Tonight' (p 13). What *Cosmopolitan* and other mags say is at the north pole and what you're saying is at the south pole. Regardless of your message (which is wise and morally correct), you must expect the same rebuke from *Cosmo* readers as you give them. A return to the middle ground is what is needed in my opinion."

Mary Griffith, Australia: "I particularly valued 'Approaching 2000: a chance to re-think' (p 14-15). Any mother longs for her daughter to be honest about the things most on her heart, and it is something to be specially valued by both. I feel for the youth in this day and age when it is taken for granted that sexual experiences are an essential part of life, and that one is missing out if not participating fully. So *Global Express* brings a breath of fresh air, gives the knowledge that there is a choice in all we do, that there are other people who chose the more difficult path, with a consequently more satisfying life."

Selwyn Hughes, England: "*Global Express* is great. Thank God for those who are providing something healthy, stimulating, encouraging and challenging for young people worldwide."

Ela Kaloshi, Albania: "I enjoyed *Global Express* very much, especially 'Scattered Thoughts'. The one I liked the best was: The teeth are smiling but is the heart? (African proverb)."

Peter Jones, France: "The work you do is invaluable and contributes in a very real way to the lives of many. I for one am always challenged and inspired from a good read of *GE*."

Lucia Nastas, Moldova: "Whilst reading the *Passion* issue an idea came to mind. Why don't you discuss loneliness? Why do people feel so lonely even though streets, offices, cafes, bars, nightclubs and cities are overcrowded? I have many friends who face this right now. They don't want to recognise that they are lonely, but it's having a bad effect on their lives. People say things like, 'Be optimistic... things will get better... respect human values... you should make new friends'. The question is: how?"

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Website Co-ordinator: Ward Vandewege **Special Thanks:** Gordon Ashman, Pieter de Pous, Jonathan Lancaster, David Lih, Cheryl Wood **Printed by:** Media Press & Print Ltd, Woodstock, Oxford, Tel: +44 (0) 1993 813273

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Not all opinions in *GE* are shared by the editors!



The Tolon Na, MP from Ghana in front of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, DC, Photo: Peter Sisam

What is freedom?

So what's freedom all about then? Political revolution? Putting a metal stud through your tongue? Standing on a box in the park and saying what you think? Backpacking around the world? Not being persecuted or tortured? Holding a passport and the right to vote? Spiritual enlightenment? Escaping grinding poverty? Dying your hair blue?

When I sat down to write this introduction, I felt burdened by the complexity of the subject. Great minds have filled huge books wrestling with this - how could I possibly sum it all up in a few hundred words? But then I realised I was mistakenly trying to produce a map - a 'this goes here and that relates to this like that' beginner's guide to some of the ideas and realities that shape our many understandings of freedom. Impossible. Instead, I offer a series of questions. Think of them like a compass - each suggests a meaningful direction to go - but none of them tell you what you'll find when you get there!

What makes a person free? Perhaps it depends on how we think about human beings. We exist in many different ways: we are physical, intellectual, political, social, sexual, spiritual beings. And just as we exist in a variety of ways, so we can experience different freedoms. But which is most important - which is really free? Can some exist without others? Or are they all equally important?

Where does your freedom end and mine begin? Have you ever found yourself saying, 'Well I suppose it's OK as long as he isn't doing anyone else any harm...'? But what is harm? Can we passively as well as actively cause harm - through self-centredness or neglect?

Can you force someone to be free? If your best friend locked himself in a tower with nothing to eat or drink but an endless supply of whisky, what would you think? That he was free to drink himself to death since it wasn't hurting anyone else? Or that you must break the door down and save him from himself? OK, this is an extreme example - but do you or your friends smoke? It's not such an easy question then, is it? What about political freedom - does one country have the right to tell another country how to govern itself?

What about money? Does money make freedom, as well as the world, go round? If you had to choose between an education and no education - what would it be? Easy, right? What if it was an education or eating? Many of the world's population are so poor that basic levels of education or healthcare are a luxury they cannot afford. Are they free? If the 20% of the world's population who live in the richest nations use 86% of the world's resources - are the world's poorest paying for the freedom of the richest with their own?

Do people want to be free? It's all very well taking your destiny into your own hands - but it's hard work. And who can you blame when things go wrong? As the German psychologist Erich Fromm has pointed out in his book 'Escape

from Freedom', freedom is a responsibility many people don't want. Like sheep, we would rather follow whoever is at the front. Do you want to be free?

Janet Gunning, New Zealand/UK

We need freedom, freedom from something and freedom to do something. We need freedom from pressure, freedom from prejudice, freedom from self-deception. At the same time we need freedom to follow our conviction, freedom to take responsibility.

Freedom without responsibility is dangerous, both for society and for the individual. My country, The Netherlands, is a sad example, as we mistake tolerance for freedom. We want to be free to take drugs, which in fact means: freedom to get enslaved. We want to be free to get rid of unborn children and also of children who are born with handicaps, who may become a burden to society. But once we accept killing as a solution for one problem, we will soon find a hundred problems which could be solved by killing.

We want to be free to decide our own death, not realising that it means taking away the protection of all those whose lives are considered useless. When doctors are no longer punished for killing patients, as is the case in Holland, the danger is that people will be killed who did not ask for it. Ultimately, it will be the doctor, not the patient, who decides it is time to die. An investigation showed that in 1995 in almost 20% of all deaths, the attending doctor decided, with explicit or partial intention, to shorten the patient's life. In half of these cases there was no request by the patient.

A colleague of mine had a patient who could die any day. His son had booked a holiday which could not be cancelled, so he asked the doctor to make sure that his father was buried before he left. Being helped to die was not in the patient's interest, but for the sake of a relative.

An internist once told me about an elderly lady with cancer and shortness of breath who would probably die within a fortnight. He wanted to admit her to the hospital. She refused as she feared she would be 'euthanized'. However, he persuaded her to come in on Saturday when he was on duty, and by Sunday night she was breathing normally. The doctor went home and returned Monday afternoon. The lady was dead. A colleague had come into the ward and given her a lethal injection saying, "It makes no difference whether this patient dies now or in a fortnight. We need this bed for someone else."

Freedom is a valuable gift, but freedom for one group may become another group's nightmare. There can be too much freedom. I worked for eight years as a doctor in Morocco. One day the mother of a government em-

**Social
revolution?
Backpacking
around the
world? Not be-
ing persecuted?
The right to
vote? Spiritual
enlightenment?
Dying your hair
blue?**

ployee came to ask for my help. Her son, whom I knew as a clever, diligent and pleasant young man, had begun smoking hash some months before. He had become addicted, sloppy, neglected his work, and even stolen money. He was dismissed, started to work in a pub, and was dismissed again. When I saw him, I gave him the

facts on hash. He said, "You should have told me before. Now I can't stop." He was no longer a free man. People say hash is a soft drug. But because the drug is strongly fat-soluble, it is rapidly absorbed by fatty organs such as the brain and causes damage.

Then there is heroin. It is very addictive; users go out stealing in order to buy it. It slows down respiration so the body does not get enough oxygen. Yet, our government is giving free heroin to hundreds of severe addicts in order to prevent them from stealing and being a nuisance to the neighbourhood. This leaves them addicted.

We call ourselves mature, which means we consider ourselves responsible, but we seem unable to cope with excessive freedom. Sometimes people have to be protected against themselves. Sometimes freedom leads to slavery. Sometimes coercion is the way to get free.

Freedom is a precious but vulnerable plant. We must be careful not to destroy it. And yet it is clear that real freedom needs to be restricted. But where should the demarcation between desirable and undesirable freedom be? Drugs harm the user, the family and the neighbourhood. Abortion harms the unborn baby, and the expecting mother. Euthanasia harms the patient whose complaints could have been treated, and society which begins to regard killing as a solution.

If the world's in a mess, it's because we use our freedom in the wrong way. Let's hope the new generation will use its freedom to create a world that is livable for everyone.

Dr Karel Gunning, The Netherlands

Accepting the trials of life is fundamental to freedom. When I left school at eighteen, I saw my chance to achieve what I wanted and to go to the places I had dreamt of. In my mind, freedom was defined by what I didn't want in life... school, my town, the people around me, and in the opportunity to get away. Only after I left these things did I become aware that they had been replaced by new "negatives", and hence how complex the concept of freedom can be.

Kalil Gibran wrote, "You shall be free indeed only when your days are not without care nor your nights without a want and a grief." He is saying, it is only when we are not free that we can become free. I will try to illustrate why this may be so.

Last year a group of us at university invited a Russian dissident poet, Irina Ratushinskaya, to speak

of her experiences in a Soviet labour camp. Her words made me reconsider where freedom comes from. She had spent many years in the camp and spoke of the deprivations, the humiliations, the periods of solitary confinement, the cold, the hunger and the gradual denigration of the human spirit. She spoke also of the people with whom she shared

her confinement - their joys, sorrows, strikes, tricks, campaigns, celebrations, friendships and disputes. She also spoke of their garden, their home-made clothes and their fastidious housekeeping - examples of normality in the face of adversity.

Finally she spoke of her freedom whilst in captivity. She cited many examples of humour and, in a sense, a degree of fondness arising from the years of hardship. On the contrary, speaking of her subsequent liberty, she frequently displayed a sense of perplexity, anger and disappointment. This isn't to allege that Irina and her fellow detainees were freer in captivity than outside. What I do wish to suggest is that the situation of adversity was such that it enabled a degree of inner freedom. What captivity gave this small group of women was the cares Kalil Gibran speaks of, a reason to fight, to live for each day. It was as if life had challenged them to either stand up and live freely or begin to die. This forced them to create a community in which they could address one another's needs and share their great fear. By doing so, they experienced a freedom which I believe is the root of Irina's humour and wisdom. Freedom, therefore, is not simply a case of being on the inside or the outside.

A writer in the last issue of *Global Express* (Passion) stated that she had never experienced great trials in her life. Unlike those who suffered in the Bosnian war or the Ethiopian famine, for example, she felt she had never had the opportunity to show courage. Given such a test she hoped she could do just that. Is it necessary to wait for situations which force courage upon us? In a sense, isn't this an easy way to escape the responsibility of everyday freedom? Is not courage in and around us each day? The difficulty with freedom such as ours is that it is almost total. Those of us living in a country like the UK are able to do and say almost anything we please - such freedom can be paralysing. We are fortunate/unfortunate to be able to walk away from practically any situation we find unpleasant or frightening. As a result we have to choose the battles we fight and find our own way to live our freedom.

If we, in the "free world", do not accept to live our outer freedoms, those accorded to us by laws, constitutions, societies and cultures, we are accepting them as yokes. This is a great mistake, for it is our inner freedom, that which we choose in life, which gives our outer freedom meaning.

James Wood, UK



Mojave Desert, California, USA, Photo: Peter Sisam

Travelling through freedom...

Travel and freedom often go together. During six weeks of travel through India, I have learnt much about this thing called freedom. It is a far more complex quality than I had imagined and one that can produce thorns as well as beautiful roses. In postmodern times, according to social theorist Zygmund Bauman, "Freedom is the value by which all other values are measured." We want freedom from obligation and to remain absolutely unconstrained by how our actions might affect others. With this interpretation of freedom alone, I would never have survived in India.

I travelled with an international group of about thirty - we were Korean, Taiwanese, Sri Lankan, Indian, Lithuanian, Australian and New Zealander. I knew very few of the group before I arrived, but to be plucked from your "comfort zone" and flung together to live twenty-four hours a day in a totally unknown context is surely one way to foster connectivity - even between individuals of such differing cultural backgrounds. And it is this connectivity that challenges the postmodern idea of the individual's "right" to absolute freedom.

I guess I'm a postmodern girl - in no hurry to marry, expect to be able to do what I like and when, and pretty good at looking after myself at the expense of others. As for self-protection strategies, they're well developed - not many people get too close, because this would put limits on my freedom. But sweating between two others on a mattress one noisy night in Madras, with the palpable pollution seeming to pound at the window to get in, I made a conscious

decision to do away with these strategies of defence. I have always been fearful of letting others know how I feel, because this brings with it what can be a frightening obligation - of empathy or connectivity. Emotions can be very strong, especially when you are far from home. I have enough trouble dealing with my own. Why would I knowingly give up my autonomy to take on the feelings of others?

The reason is that this connectivity led to a new kind of freedom. By letting go of the fears to which I had clung so tightly for so long, I was left with the freedom to care for others - the freedom to weep when I listened to the horrific experiences of two from Sri Lanka; the freedom to simply be with those who became ill; the freedom to laugh when someone bit into a particularly hot chilli (sorry - not that funny!) And at the same time, I felt more grateful than I can tell for the unrestrained care shown by others toward me. This kind of freedom is not one that severs connections or that promotes individual autonomy, and it can be a difficult freedom to accept - especially in our comfortable day-to-day environments when obligation can seem like an unwanted tie. But when life is not easy, it is only this freedom to care - and to be cared for - that keeps us going.

Nicci Long, Australia

I can still remember my seventeen-year-old self twirling around in my graduation gown outside school, proudly waving my diploma, smiling for the cameras, and running up and down with my former classmates shouting, "Freedom! We're done with school for good!"

What a feeling. After being stuck in a classroom for twelve years, it was impossible not to chant the famous lines, "No more pencils, no more books, no more teachers' dirty looks!" Free from classes, free from homework, free from the chore and bore of the school routine. Now that my compulsory education was through, it was up to me to decide what I'd do with my days. At home with my new-found freedom I set out on a path to a life of relaxation. I put my scientific calculator and Mickey Mouse pencil sharpener away, and I made my bedroom an alarm-clock-free zone. I spread on some sunscreen, grabbed a towel and headed to the pool for some serious thinking about what to do now that I could do anything.

After much consideration my decision was made. I was going back to school. Yes indeed. I was off to university in two months' time, settling down for four more years behind a book.

But how could I go back to school after I had just achieved my hard earned freedom? From television to term papers, from relaxation to research. Who would make that move? I did. And so did almost all the friends who had done the diploma dance with me only two months earlier. No one forced us to, but after high school came university, and that's just the way it worked. It was expected.

University was much less restrictive than high school, and I was free to skip lectures and classes if I wanted to. Unfortunately, this freedom was not really free. It came with the expensive designer price of low grades and less than thrilled

parents. If I wanted to achieve, my main freedom was going to have to be the freedom to choose which corner of the library I'd burrow in each evening.

When my years of burrowing at last came to an end, I emerged from my book tunnel to celebrate another graduation. Again I waved my diploma, smiled, and said, "I'm free and done with school for good!"

Then I turned my free, done-with-school-for-good self right around and walked back through the same university doors I had just exited. All I needed were two more years of study for a master's degree. How could I resist? It was the next logical step.

And so, after almost twenty years of academia, with a master's degree firmly in place and a third diploma in hand, I found myself again leaving school. Free once more. Finally. I was finished with the classroom, the studies, the assignments, the professors. Even my friend the librarian was ready to see me go. It was now off to the real world of a career. Time to go to work.

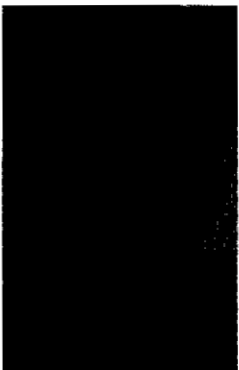
So, what was my chosen field? Where would I finally place myself now that a world of possibilities lay before me? Certainly it wouldn't be... couldn't be... tell me it wasn't... school. "Good morning class. My name is Miss Kenny and I'll be your new teacher. Please take out your pencils and books."

I suppose it made perfect sense for me to become a teacher. After all, teachers had been at the end of my line of vision since I was five years old. If you stare at something long enough, maybe you turn into it. And anyway, I respected teachers. They had helped me to become smart, and they'd brought me from behind the desk to where I stood now in front of the class. Never mind the fact that I was once again inside four walls in a building called school.

And this still wasn't always such a great place to be. Often



School in Tolon, Greece, Photo: Peter Sisam



"He doesn't like
having to
conform..."

...if he can
help it."

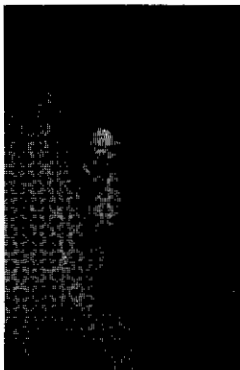


Photo: Lisa Kesby

my students would look at me as the paper airplanes flew by and ask, "Why on earth did you become a teacher?" At airplane moments I was always unable to come up with an answer to that question, which gave plenty of time for the askers to sit back and say with conviction, "I know I wouldn't be here if I didn't have to be."

And maybe that's where the answer hid. I liked school more when I didn't have to be there. It was my choice to be a teacher, and I was free to leave that profession if I chose to. Teaching wasn't compulsory, it wasn't expected, it wasn't the next logical step. It was just what I'd decided to do through my own free will.

I'd known all along that education was a privilege, and that's one reason why I opted for it again and again. However, there's always something nice about coming to the end of a school year, and that might be another reason. The end of the year brings feelings of accomplishment, relief, and that sense of freedom that I had as a seventeen-year-old graduate. In fact, freedom has been so intermingled with my academic experience that I could probably spend a whole summer contemplating it. As soon as school's out, I think I will.

Christine Kenny, USA

We're in the kitchen, Francis (aged 5) and I (aged 40), making a pie for supper. He loves cooking and raw pastry... rolling and eating it. It takes much longer and I have to turn the radio off. After battering the pastry round a bit, and some genuinely useful carrot peeling, he's off. Attached to his stool is the

cord he tied on (for reasons known only to himself) before going to school. He looks around for something to knot to the other end. Obviously, the best option is Mummy's leg. So I finish the pie and put it in the oven, negotiating that the stool stay in the middle of the kitchen floor so I can reach everything, and protesting when the knot gets too tight.

I'm always saying that this boy is like a ball and chain around my ankle (although he is very cute and I love him). I never seem to be able to get on with my life. So to help, I'm doing a course on Assertive Parenting: how to say 'no' firmly but respectfully etc. On Thursday nights, my daughter (aged 10) says, "Don't learn anything, Mummy!"

At the first session we went through some stuff about rights and responsibilities, which didn't seem to have much to do with assertiveness. For each of our rights there are corresponding responsibilities. For example, if I have a right to be treated with respect, I have a responsibility to treat others with respect. I wondered what the point of all this was, until the penny dropped. Assertiveness is about choice. Say I wanted to drive to pick my son up from school but fancied driving on the other side of the road... it wouldn't work. I'm free to drive but have to conform or I'll be in trouble. Anyway, I choose to walk!

We have choices to make, all the time. We had a right to send our son to the local school. I now keep getting hauled in to see the teachers, because he doesn't like having to conform if he can help it. Once I had to see the Headteacher and suddenly felt 30 years younger (not a nice feeling!). If I've done my best for him at home, it's their

job to sort him out at school. I tend to spend all day worrying (about having to go back to see the Head) but have to make myself get on with life while he's there. I have to use my freedom well. Like Cinderella, I only have a certain amount of time - until 3pm in my case.

My little son has rights and responsibilities. He has to trade independence for co-operation at school, in order to be interested and to learn. He has to learn not to kick other children, in order to make friends. He is not free to act as he would like. But he is free to choose to act a certain way because the pay-off will be good.

I feel as if I have a lot of responsibilities, but I do get a lot of pay-off. I cook dinner, but I choose what we eat. I get my work done, and I get paid for it. I comb the children's hair for nits, then cuddle them (the children, not the nits.) Rewards, rights, freedom. All choices in the long run, even if some of the bigger ones do depend on voting for the least bad bunch of politicians.

I would like to get choice through to our small dog who, confused in his doggy psychology, feels he has to attack all large dogs he meets on his walks. He is not free to do this, partly because their owners don't like it. And I am not going to take him for walks if I have to spend my time apologising and dragging him out of trouble. So whenever another dog appears, I have to go into training mode, quick. One day, it will all click in his furry little head, by a simple process of choice. Obey muddled instinct, or go to heel and get a biscuit. Then he doesn't get put on the lead and values his freedom as much as we do!

Susan Riddell, UK

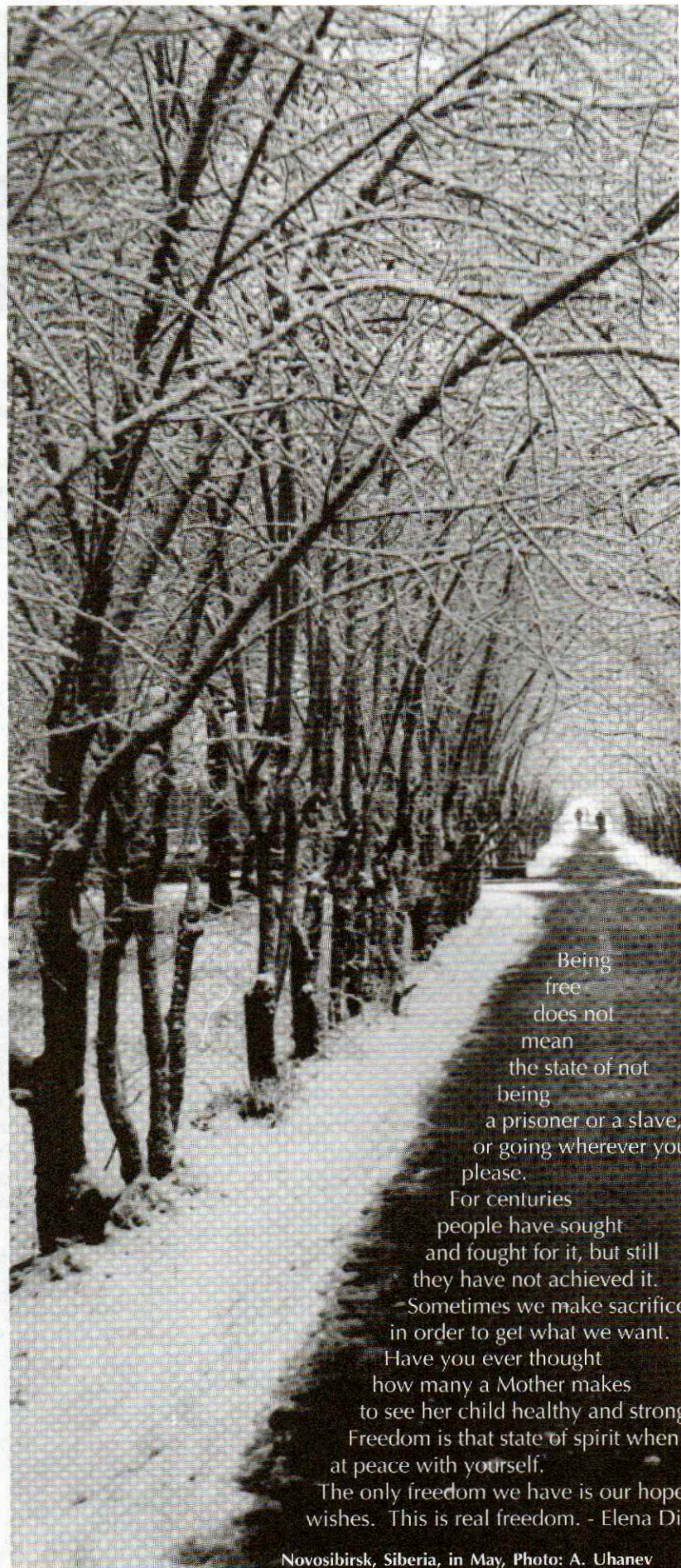
I love creative people. People who are themselves. People who are not ashamed of who they are or where they come from. That's not easy; by showing your "real" self you are more vulnerable. That is freedom with all its risks.

Having come from a communist country where individuality and personality were not encouraged, I didn't think much of myself as a person. I was just "another brick in the wall". Trying to free yourself from the oppression, either by speaking up or writing it down was something you had to pay a price for. At secondary school I remember being told off for wearing a cross around my neck (communism denies the existence of God). My teacher said she understood that wearing a cross was the fashion (popular English band *Depeche Mode*) but that I should know better. I had the choice of telling her I wore it because I was Christian and risk being expelled, or of saying nothing. I chose the latter. I was too scared.

Ten years ago Eastern European countries were freed from totalitarian regime. The feeling of euphoria was everywhere. I thought: everything is going to be great. We could travel all over the world (provided we had the money) and study languages. Tourism and "Western" culture came in. Suddenly we turned from a Russian influence to an American one. "West is best" prevailed. Another feature of the new "freedom" was the lack of time-out. Many people started their own businesses which required time and money. We used to be a very family-orientated people. Now many are too busy to spend a weekend with their family because of the business.

Three years ago I turned down two well-paid jobs to go to the UK and work with *Foundations For Freedom*, a programme for the newly acquired democracies in Eastern European countries. Some of my friends thought I was mad to go there for a year and work for pocket money. But I chose to do it because of the things I would learn and for my personal growth. Two years down the track I was in Australia doing a similar thing - working voluntarily. Most of my school-mates have well-paid jobs and are starting their own families, but I am in no rush. I want to mature, to deal with the things I would rather hide forever.

I said I like people who are not afraid of who they are. Recently I had my nose pierced. I'm not saying that to be ourselves we have to do drastic things. I did it partly because it's "in" but mainly because I like it. It says: This is Gabra, the way she is. I am happy I had the freedom to choose.



Being
free
does not
mean
the state of not
being
a prisoner or a slave,
or going wherever you
please.

For centuries
people have sought
and fought for it, but still
they have not achieved it.

Sometimes we make sacrifice
in order to get what we want.

Have you ever thought
how many a Mother makes
to see her child healthy and strong
Freedom is that state of spirit when
at peace with yourself.

The only freedom we have is our hope
wishes. This is real freedom. - Elena D



ou are
thoughts, dreams,
onu, Moldova

I am sitting on green grass. I can hardly see the edge of the field. It meets the sky somewhere on the horizon, so everything around me is in green-blue shades. It's amazing to see green in the middle of winter. Where I come from, winter means white, whether you like it or not. It's fantastic. I have never thought about whether it is good or bad to live in such a remote place as Siberia. We never complain that it is cold; we regret that we have not put on an extra layer. I say "we" because I was brought up to. "We" meant that you were not alone, that there was someone to back you up and give a helping hand if needed. So we enjoy our winter and those who leave the country for good miss it.

I have the same feelings when I recollect my childhood. I miss the sense of unity, security and inspiration I felt as a Soviet Union citizen. I believed it was the best place to live, the "brotherhood of nations". I tried hard to be a good person to merit a place in that happy and high standard society. I had a faith in my country and in my people, never thinking about whether their ideas were Communist or not. They gave me freedom to dream and to make plans for the future.

Then everything changed. I was told that I believed in fake ideas, that I was a slave who was now free. The 12th of June was established as Independence Day. Everybody asked, "Independence from what?", and could find no answer. Only the media was really free. They revealed the hidden facts of our history and overwhelmed people with information which was not always authentic. This generated fear in me - fear of the past and of the future.

Sometimes I can be a prisoner of my own thoughts. I fear something bad will happen which might make my world as small as a shell, inside which I could be locked by myself. I try to remember that it is always worth talking to people, asking them about

something or for something. The worst that could happen is that they refuse to talk to me or say no, but at least I would not blame myself for missed opportunities.

For me, feelings of freedom and happiness usually coincide, but very often my happiness depends on

other people and there can be no guarantees. Sometimes I wonder what

"Accepting the past and leaving it behind lets me out of a trap."

it's like to be a river - to flow through different places, to see various people, to belong to no-one, to be neither good nor bad, to just exist. Is that freedom? Sometimes we suffer so much because of others that it is tempting to put up an iron curtain to protect ourselves, or to sting before we are stung. Or does being vulnerable, like the thin grass in this changeable English weather, make us free?

Being open and honest with people (whilst being aware that we could be hurt and rejected), being able to forgive both ourselves and others - could this give us freedom in relationships? Years of bitterness can destroy the soul and make us miserable. Suddenly we find ourselves living in the past, not able to let go or to find inspiration for the future.

Accepting the past and leaving it behind lets me out of a trap. Freedom is to see the opportunities and to use them to go forward. There are places in my heart or mind that cannot be affected by anyone. Things that belong to me and no-one else. Only I know about their existence - they cannot be taken away. This gives me inner freedom, maintains light and keeps me moving. It is the most powerful drive in me and makes me forget about the cold winter and rainy weather.

Lena Stepanova, Russia

the booming cherries dance company

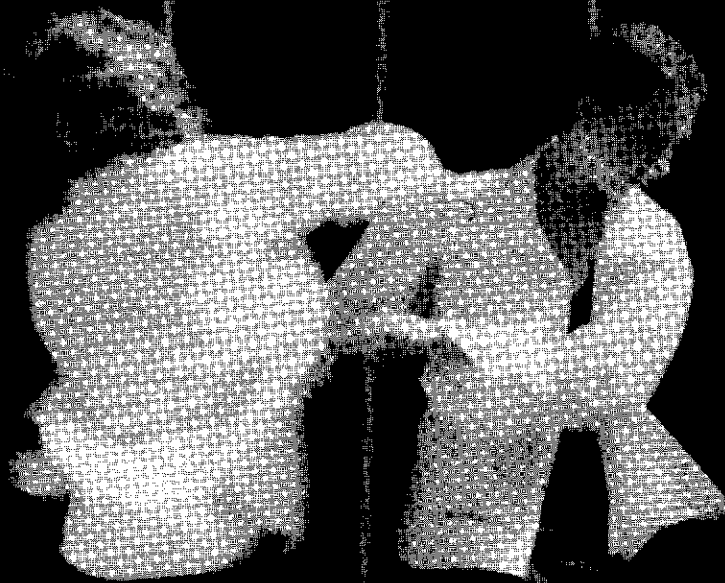


Photo: Paul Welch

Name: Kerry Chappell

Education: BA (Hons) Experimental Psychology, Oxford University

Dance Training: Oxford University Dance Society, One Year Special Course at London Contemporary Dance School

Profession: Education, Training and Community Administrator at Laban Centre London

Name: Saydi Williams

Education: BTEC National Diploma in the Performing Arts (2yrs), Coventry Centre for the Performing Arts

Dance Training: BTEC Higher National Diploma in Dance (2yrs), Newcastle College (Dance City based), One Year Special Course at London Contemporary Dance School

Profession: Stage Hand at the Phoenix Theatre in the West End, London

What's your personal definition of freedom?

KC It's difficult to define freedom when it's something, in political and social terms, that you take for granted. It can be seen from many different standpoints - freedom of speech, choice, religion, action... I'd say outside physical freedom, it's having the right to express your own opinions and act on them without restriction (as long as they don't harm or impose on others!), whether those opinions relate to more global issues about politics or philosophy, or whether they relate to something as small-scale as the type of dance you perform and teach, and to what kind of audience you take it.

SW Yes, I think it's very much to do with state of mind and having the capacity to do what you want without the invasion of other people's opinions. Those opinions can be expressed, as long as they are constructive and

not detrimental or restrictive. We're very lucky in that we perform pieces we have created, and work with students in a way that we choose. We do take this freedom of expression for granted because so far it has never been questioned.

Why dance?

KC Our first response to that was "no choice". When you're involved in dance you don't weigh up the pros and cons of dance, as opposed to water polo, and decide which of the two you prefer. You're involved because you have to be. It's quite hard to explain unless you're a dancer; it's an impulse that doesn't go away... quite interesting in terms of "freedom". Sometimes, I do feel that I haven't had the "freedom" to do lots of other things, but it's not a forced lack of freedom, it's something I've always known I would do.

SW I never knew anything different - dance has always

been the strongest and most overwhelming driving force.

Why are you called "the booming cherries dance company" and how did you come into being?

KC The name comes from our two nicknames at school. Saydi used to be called Boo and, unfortunately, I earned the title Cherry Krappell!

SW We came into being when we were asked by a choreographer with whom we were both performing to create a ten minute piece to fill a gap in the programme. The piece went down very well and we decided to enter it for a few dance platforms in London. That was in April 1997, and before we knew it, we had a packed agenda of performances and workshops. We then decided to make it official and developed our own ideas about how and where we wanted to perform and who we wanted to work with, ie. taking dance to those who would not normally have access to the artform. Hence, the summer of 1998 was spent performing and teaching at Street Festivals, on beaches, in caravan parks and in church halls.

Is it rewarding working with people with Special Needs and/or no dance experience?

KC Saydi has a lot more experience in this area than I do, and it's something that she has encouraged me to take part in. I admit, I was apprehensive in the first Special Needs workshop we did, but now I do enjoy them and find some of the outcomes quite amazing.

SW Yes, very rewarding. Dance is not always something that people with Special Needs get a chance to be a part of. This form of expression is often overlooked and can bring the most unlikely people out of their shell.

What's the best and the worst feature of this type of work?

KC The best time is when the penny drops for a workshop participant, or when someone who has never seen contemporary dance before gets the point, or you get a real buzz from performing; it makes you instantly forget you ever had any problems.

SW On the other hand, when a workshop or performance doesn't work, it can simply end up being hard work, both physically and mentally - which, on top of a full time job, can be difficult in terms of motivation.

What is the worst thing that has ever happened to you during a performance?

KC/SW A boy with a dog in tow once cycled through one of our street performances, and at the same outdoor venue the following year there was a massive thunderstorm. The piece we were performing was the one in the photo on the cover and involved throwing ten Yellow Pages around - not fun when they're sodden with water; we wrang our costumes out when we'd finished.

What advice would you give to aspiring dancers/performers?

KC If you're an aspiring dancer, then as we said at the beginning, you probably don't need telling because you're

going to do it anyway. I'd just say that when you look back, you're likely to be amazed at what you've overcome on the way.

SW Don't be disheartened by the word "No". There is always something else round the corner and especially in the arts, a 'no' is often not because you were at fault, but because your big toe wasn't the right shape! Never think that you're tackling problems on your own; there's always someone else in the same boat.

What motivates you?

KC The satisfaction of seeing someone who either never thought they would dance or seeing someone who always thought contemporary dance was impenetrable, understand and get the point.

SW Having the freedom to be able to do something I want and the "drug" of performance.

What are your hopes for the future?

KC To keep on taking our work to places that wouldn't normally experience it. I'd also like to be much more involved in dance education policy and particularly research, which is something that I got into at the end of my degree at Oxford.

SW To provide better opportunities for people with Special Needs and their experience of the arts.

Which people have influenced/inspired you?

KC "LaLaLa Human Steps" is the most inspiring dance company I've seen in a while. Personally, my dad has had a big influence on the way I've done things and also a dancer called Jacqui Malone, who I met while I was at Oxford. She didn't start her training until she was nineteen and was instrumental in my decision to go back to dance after University.

SW My mum and my family who continue to spark my love for the theatre and Phyllis Kempster, who, although she never approved, taught me all she knew.

Do you think dance will ever decline/die out?

KC Dance comes from people and continually evolves alongside their lives. At the forefront of the profession currently, dance is highly involved with technology and state of the art developments in this field. It will always be there.

SW No, dance will always be a part of society. As long as bodies move, there will be dance.

What would you most like to say to the world's youth?

KC It's actually nothing to do with dance - don't damage the planet anymore and recycle as many things as you can.

SW Don't give up, you only get one chance.

Where can people get more information about your events?

They can call us about workshops or performances (indoor and outdoor) on 0171 241 2087. We are also looking for sponsors (in kind and donations) for the summer of 1999. All enquiries welcome!

Laura Trevelyan, UK 13

Like Edith Piaf, I do not regret a thing - I have had a very fortunate life and see each of my relationships as a gift.

Four key relationships stand out. The first was at school where I met my "best friend". We met at thirteen, and were together for seven years - the period when we were beginning to go out into the world independently. We kept each other company throughout this whole ordeal and talked for hours to reach our logical conclusions about the things

we were experiencing. We shared absolutely every aspect of our lives - philosophy, life, the cosmos, girls... we had such a lot of fun, and life was never boring or lonely.

We played a large part in forming each other too. Together we decided that God and religion didn't make sense, and that everyone who talked about it was crazy. Together we decided that drugs would be worth trying, and subsequently that they were good. We also became vegetarians together. We both went to India after school. Someone there suggested that our close friendship, which had given us so much joy and companionship, might not be the best thing for us. I rejected this view as nonsense, and we worked out our new philosophical theory: one should never have an opinion about what someone else is doing, as one can never know more about somebody else than they know themselves. I have since revised this theory.

We are still the best of friends, only our lives have gone different ways, separated by geography and commitments. I think this is a much better situation; while certain friends can help us grow, as he undoubtedly did, there comes a point when the friendship seems to take on a value above all else. Then it becomes exclusive, selfish and a block to our inner freedom, manifested by a lack of personal growth.

Life took me to a new city where I had no friends. This, combined with the feeling of loss through not being with my best friend, left me feeling very, very lonely. I took up smoking, and was soon going out with a girl from my class. We enjoyed each other's company and found each other attractive. It was soon obvious that I had only started going out with her because then I didn't feel so lonely, when in fact I still was. My problems lay within me and were not due

**"Lust and loneliness
left little leeway for love."**

to my situation. I had to finish the relationship immediately, as I couldn't live a lie. This was a very difficult time, as she relied on me a lot as a friend, particularly when she had trouble with clinical depression. She took it all quite badly despite my attempts to be nice, and it was only about a year and a half later that we were able to have an almost normal conversation.

We had just been using each other to fulfil our needs at the time, and much as we cared for each

other, I do not feel that love ever came into the equation. Lust and loneliness left little leeway for love.

After some time I experienced a totally different kind of friendship. I had learned more to stand on my own two feet and to depend less on the opinion of others. My new friend was the same, so much so that he was prepared to tell me quite honestly where he felt I was going wrong in life. He had a different view on drugs to my friend in school and was not afraid to tell me. This was not much fun, nor did it seem like friendship at the time, but if this kind of challenging friendship is handled sensitively, it can become a cornerstone of the mysterious thing we call love.

The final friendship is the one I have with my present girlfriend. I find this the most remarkable of all. My life was full and fun and I was not looking for love, but she says she had felt for some time that I was the right person for her. I only realised this afterwards.

We live very far apart, which is not such fun, but is quite healthy for us, as it means we still have space to grow as individuals, and we don't get caught in the trap of staying together because it is comfortable. Many times we have asked each other and ourselves if we are meant to be together. We both strongly believe that God has a plan for our lives, including whether we should remain single, or whom we are meant to be with. We are both committed to living according to this idea, so we have our most important aims in common. This, I hope, makes us forward- and outward-looking in our relationship, and we try not to be selfishly looking at ourselves above all else. It certainly makes the relationship much stronger and deeper.

However, living this kind of life has not proven easy, par-

FAX-THINK-LINK

The Fax-Think-Link is a gathering of ideas and opinions. Next issue we look at:

What is pure in a relationship between a man and woman?

Contact gloalex@oxford.mra.org.uk or fax the editors at +44-1865-311950, by May 30, 1999.

*This issue: **Does Hollywood rule our imaginations?***

Cristina Mosneaga, Moldova

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When I was five I used to dream of a princess. A beautiful, kind, almighty daughter of a king. When

my brother was ten he used to be James Bond. A "real one". My girlfriends are twenty and try hard to update their images to those of strong-willed, powerful, fashionable women. They're all Sharon Stones. Hollywood had been ruling our imaginations since early childhood. But when we grew up we realised that our ideals were far from being perfect. I stopped being influenced by Hollywood when I started working. I faced the problems of real life, and all my dreams faded away. It did not mean that everyday life and routine killed the princess in me. She still lives somewhere deep in my heart. It's just that I became mature and now my imagination is ruled by examples from real life. That's

ticularly in two areas. Firstly, it is very hard to be prepared to give it all up if I feel it is not God's will for us to be together. I always have to be open to this possibility, but more and more I get the sense that we have been given something sacred. The second difficulty is the question of purity. In a loving relationship between a man and a woman, what is pure? Again, I have found that the only way to be sure is to be totally obedient to the thought that God or the inner voice gives me. These have always coincided with the thoughts of my girlfriend, and although we have been scared to say the things we deeply feel are right, it has always worked out for the best.

Through this process we have learned a lot about what it means to be pure and to respect our own, as well as each other's bodies and

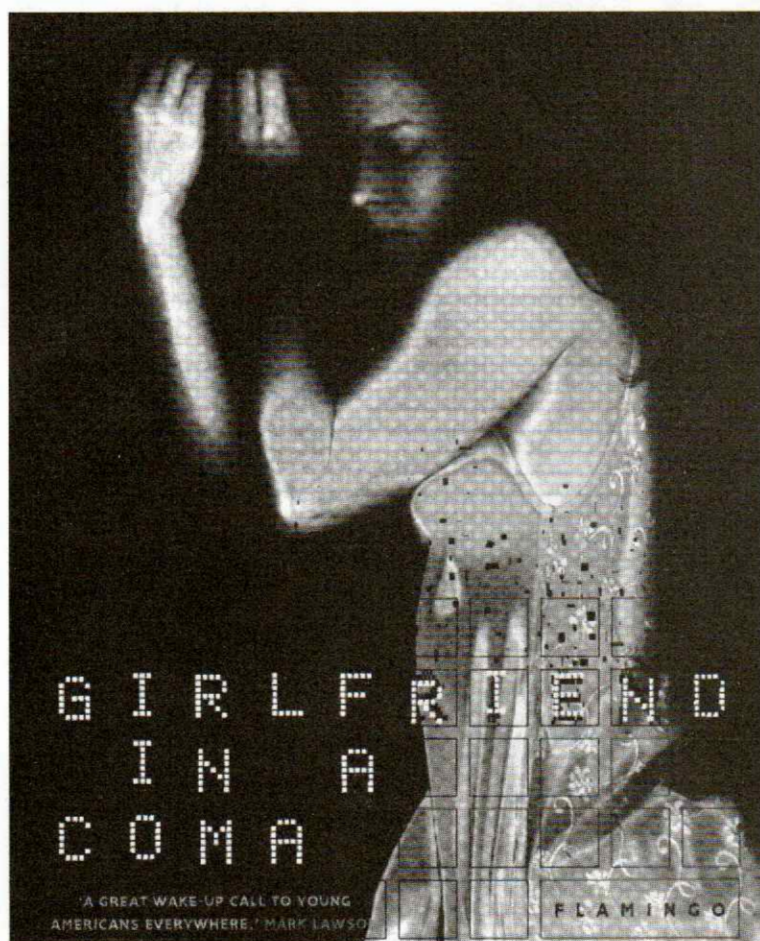
hearts. This has also meant that we are free to be the people we are supposed to be.

Anonymous

What would you do if your girlfriend woke up from a coma after 18 years and told you the world was about to end? For Richard and his friends, who have just spent 18 years being miserable, this is kind of hard to cope with. What is worse is that the prediction comes true, and the small band of friends could be the only ones who can save the planet. Only they haven't got a clue. In his latest novel, *Girlfriend in a Coma*, Canadian author Douglas Coupland continues on the path he started on with his debut *Generation X*. That was mainly concerned with the lives of thirty-somethings in the 90s, charting the emptiness of post-modern society. But even in *Generation X*, Coupland seemed to be looking for something to fill that emptiness. In his later novels, *Shampoo Planet* and *Microserfs*, his characters tried to fill the void with storytelling and pleasant work. In *Life after God* he came to the (surprising?) conclusion that what modern-day society might be missing is religion. *Girlfriend in a Coma* takes the search even further. And although he needs a ghost and an impossible time-leap to get his message across, he still manages to tell a convincing story, packed with his usual dose of humour. But unlike his fellow Generation X-er Brett Easton Ellis, Coupland is not content with merely describing the lives of today's young adults. Where Ellis limits himself to writing books about hollow people, who may be searching for something but never hard enough to find anything, Coupland finds the escape. Again, he has managed to write a gripping and enjoyable book which, after you've closed it, will give you plenty to think about.

Geert-Willem Overdijkink, The Netherlands

Girlfriend in a Coma is published by Regan Books, a division of HarperCollins New York. ISBN 0-06-039178-2



FAX-THINK-LINK

better for me.

Anya Panybratova, Crimea

When you ask a little boy whom he wants to become in the future, he doesn't reply, "...a fireman, or a spaceship pilot". His answer, for sure, will be, "I wanna be a Batman", or more likely, "Schwarzenegger". We measure things by categories, comparing the life stories of ordinary people with movie legends. Adventurous couples resemble "Bonnie and Clyde", and women chased by violence are represented by "Thelma and Louise". We live according to patterns. Even the word "image" has a perverted, non-poetic meaning. I see dozens of young girls who are exact copies of Mila

Yovovich ("Fifth Element") with red hair à l'extrême. I am not writing this to complain about people's laziness and uninventiveness. I merely despise those who deny themselves the sacred chance of exercising their individualism among the masses. No, I don't think Hollywood rules our imaginations. I believe we let it happen!

Nelly-Joyce Katito, Zimbabwe

Hollywood is a celebration of our imaginations. The film industry has given birth to innumerable characters, some of whom many have come

Life After Death Row

At the age of eighteen I acquired a voracious appetite for everything I thought was "radical and revolutionary". The ideas of Karl Marx and world communism challenged me; I turned away from God and the faith my parents had passed on to me as a child. I wanted to become a radical intellectual!

In those years, my country Norway was occupied by Nazi Germany. I was active in the Resistance Movement. A good year after my "conversion" to atheism, at dawn one day in the summer of 1943, five Gestapo officers surrounded our house. They broke their way into our home and with bright flashlights and Sten guns forced me out of bed.

I got dressed and they forced me out into their car. I heard my mother's voice, shaking as she called, "Leif, don't forget Jesus." I felt embarrassed. "Jesus," I mumbled to myself, "that's only for old women and invalids."

I was taken to Gestapo Headquarters for interrogation. Then I was locked in solitary confinement where I was strictly guarded for several months.

I suddenly found myself in a world of evil that I had never believed possible. I experienced humans who behaved as beasts. I had been robbed of everything: freedom, home and family, friends and everything I possessed. In other words, I was utterly alone, destitute, betrayed and forsaken, just surrounded by four brick walls. There were no books in the cell, no pencil, not a bit of paper.

After about three months had passed, one of the Gestapo chiefs came into the cell and told me I would be executed. "But your case has to go through the Police Court first," he added. I was faced with the reality that I was going to lose the last thing I possessed: my life. At that moment of painful realisation, everything in me cried out to live. In those days of rock-bottom reality, I learned that no darkness of man-made hell can prevent the hand of God - the God I had denied - from breaking through. I experienced a divine force transcending my physical existence and intellectual understanding.

One day, as I was pacing around the cell, I was reminded of the times I went to church with my parents. I seldom listened to the sermons, but one thing always touched me

and that was the communion service. So, as I walked in the cell, I started to sing, as our pastor always sang, "In the same night as He was betrayed and I had been betrayed, He took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it..."

As I sang, suddenly I realised what Jesus had gone through. I experienced Him in a new reality. He had been betrayed, and I had been betrayed. He had been tortured and I had been tortured. He had been crucified, and I was going to be executed. It was as if Christ were physically walking beside me saying: "Don't be afraid, Leif, I have been through all this for you. I am with you. I am the conqueror. Follow me." The fear that had gripped me disappeared, the sadness of my heart turned to joy and I knew that neither Gestapo nor the fear of execution any longer had power over me. I was free inside. And with that inner certainty I knelt down and prayed: "Whatever be Your will God, let that come to pass. But if I may live and even be free once again, I give You the whole of my life to use as you see best."

For some reason the death sentence was never carried out. So God gave me the privilege of living. I had to ask myself: was I saved for a purpose? I was transferred to a concentration camp and allocated to a room with twelve other intellectuals and convinced communists.

One day I got to know a Christian student in the camp and we became very close friends. His name was Olaf. We strolled around the camp talking of our studies and what we would do when we got home. We shared our hopes and longings, our joys and expectations, our troubles and uncertainties. One morning it all came to an end. Olaf and four of his friends had been taken to the Police Court in Oslo and been condemned to death. In the afternoon they were back in the concentration camp and put in the death cell. The news spread fast.

Before the evening roll-call I walked under the window of the cell where Olaf and his friends were. I wanted so much to show solidarity with them. Many of the other prisoners were standing around waiting for roll-call and among them were some of my radical friends, with whom I especially wanted to be in good standing. I nodded to them.

Then I saw Olaf at the window. His hands were grasping

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to love and respect. Planets, palaces, and places never heard of have become so real, you could almost give directions! To say that Hollywood rules our imaginations is unfair. Our imaginations are the most dynamic power we possess. They cannot be bound, restricted or ruled; they can run wild. Film producers have simply taken our imaginations and put them on the big screen. Sadly though, the imaginations of a few have had a strong influence on the choices many of us make in our lives. More and more are losing their individuality and becoming clones of silver screen stars. New concepts and lifestyles are highly popularised at the

expense of what was once a culturally and morally acceptable way of life. It would appear that unwittingly or otherwise, our complacency with issues such as co-habiting, teenage sex, planned single parenthood, etc., seems to grow proportionately with our exposure to screen material that preaches the message of compromise and 'free thinking'. I'm fascinated by a new breed of pre-adolescent and adolescent Zimbabweans which seems to be growing. Their vocabulary is less conventional and "classroomy", and more from popular movies or series. I'll hang my head now and admit that Hollywood can rule our sense of individuality.

the iron bars and he had pulled himself up so that he could see out. His eyes shone and his glance took us all in. Then he saw me and called in a strong clear voice: "Thanks for your comradeship, Leif. Never give up the fight for Christ."

I glanced at the others standing around me, and kept quiet. I didn't answer Olaf. When roll-call was over and I went back to the hut, I thought about the way Peter in the Bible denied that he knew Jesus. I went to the bathroom - the only place where I could be alone - and wept. Then I felt as if Christ was touching me and saying: "Don't be distressed. Stand up and follow Me."

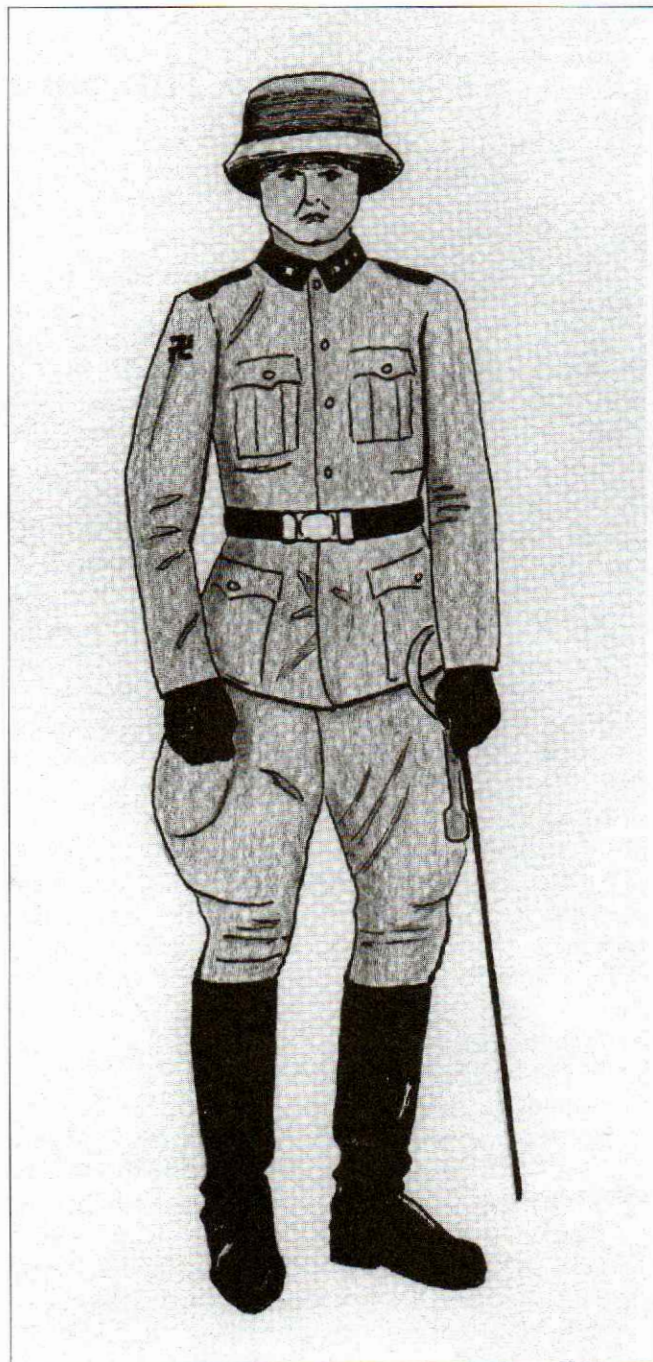
That same night the condemned men were taken away. In the morning we heard that before they were executed, Olaf had read aloud from the New Testament: "Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, pain or persecution? Can lack of clothes and food, danger to life and limb, the threat of force of arms? No, I have become absolutely convinced that neither death nor life... nor anything else in God's whole world has any power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

I decided at that time never again to deny the truth of Christ and to follow Him regardless of my many shortcomings. And I have learned that to follow Him is not a question of success or failure, but a question of grace and commitment. Mother Teresa once said that "God has not called me to be successful, God has called me to be faithful."

We live in a time of history with great uncertainties, with upheavals and suffering, with want and injustice. The world is in the melting pot. But one supreme task stands out for which we will be made responsible: to follow Him, and through Him and by Him to save a crumbling civilisation. Or, if it should crumble, to sow the seeds which God can bring to fruition, in His way and at His time.

Thus the roll-call that sounded about 2000 years ago is as relevant today: "Then Jesus called his disciples and the people around him, and he said to them, 'If anyone wants to follow in my footsteps, he must give up all right to himself, take up his cross and follow Me.'"

Leif Hovelsen, Norway



Art: Christine Kenny

FAX-THINK-LINK

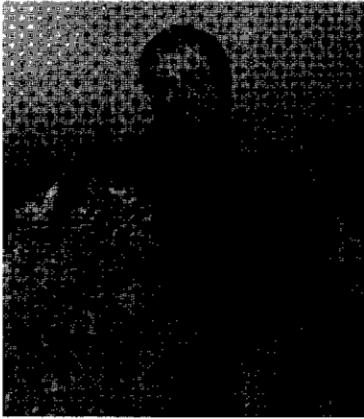
Instead of standing out as Nelly-Joyce, I'd be far happier to be recognised as Halle Berry! But our imaginations, I still maintain, will always be our own untouchable treasures.

Philip Peters, UK

I would say yes and no. Huge aspects of our imaginations are linked to movies or TV. For example, in Sweden this summer my friend and I were fishing on a boat, when my Dad exclaimed, "I bet you, any minute all these terrorists come up from under the deck and hold us hostage, and Sean Connery will have to save us!" I feel we learn a lot

from movies and TV, and I think up little movie ideas in my head as I walk through town or lie in bed etc. The creativity we show as children is often lost as we grow older and is replaced by things we have to know, such as times-tables etc. Personally, I think movies are a good source of knowledge for the average person - people would be very boring without them. Each person has some imagination - it just needs to be found. I certainly don't think it's bad that Hollywood dominates our imagination, because our imagination is what we want it to be. There are many great films and something to be learnt from all of them.

The paradox of *Freedom*



"Freedom". What is this word that has the power to stir us so deeply, to lift the heart, to inspire men and women to great deeds and even to lay down their lives? No-one who saw the film *Braveheart* can fail to have been moved by its triumphant cry on the lips of the dying hero William Wallace.

"Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains," wrote Karl Marx in the middle of the last century, inspiring millions to sacrifice everything for a new world order. Yet, while great strides have been made in some areas, freedom remains elusive.

The truth is that freedom means different things to different people. For the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo it means an end to Serbian rule. For Marxists it means an end to economic exploitation when the workers own the means of production. For black people living in countries where power is held by the whites, it means equal rights and opportunities, regardless of colour. For many adolescents it simply means an end to parental tyranny.

The late Sir Isaiah Berlin wrote that there are basically two types of understanding of freedom - negative and positive. The first kind sees freedom as the absence of some kind of restriction - freedom from something. The second sees freedom as an actual condition - for example Marx defines it as "realised necessity" - having (and knowing) what you need, while some religions have defined freedom as serving God. Berlin preferred the first option, pointing out that the second has led to totalitarian regimes in places like Russia or Iran. Yet, there are problems with the first too. I remember a conversation with a student from Moscow who thought that freedom was a bad thing for Russia. As he saw it, freedom meant a breakdown of law and order, freedom for some people to become obscenely rich at the expense of others, freedom for the fraudsters, gangsters and drug pushers.

There is an old Sufi proverb that when God wants to drive a man insane he gives him what he wants. When you stop to really think about it, it's obvious - because what we want is never really straightforward. Things we want often contradict each other. I want to eat that chocolate, but I don't want to get fat. I want to get good grades but I'd rather go out and party than study. I want the government to spend more on the things I care about, but I don't want to pay more taxes. Short-term desires

often oppose long-term goals. This is a vital moral lesson which we learn as children - in fact it's more than a moral lesson, it's a life-skill. And you only need to look around you to see that it's equally true for institutions - whether governments, businesses or sports clubs.

So, if freedom means to **do what we want**, then we first need to know what we really want. What are our values?

Many of our most important goals in life involve other people. Despite the **Western myth** of individualism, we are not superheroes who can manage on our own. Whether we know it or want it, we are playing a team game.

When people play football it is vital they know the rules. Without them there is **no shared understanding** of what the aims are and **nothing makes sense** - one person might be trying to sit on the ball, another might be ignoring the ball and trying to swing from the goal. The rules are not there to stop people from enjoying themselves, they are simply part of the game. In the game of life, instead of "rules" we have **morality and values**.

For centuries in the **West**, our ideas about freedom have been shaped by people who found they didn't like the game they found themselves playing. In the name of freedom they shrugged off the tyranny of the state, or the church. More recently, Nietzsche and Sartre wanted to break free from social conventions and attitudes which they didn't share, and their ideas were taken up in the 60s by a whole generation, most of whom had never read a word by them. Values and morality were considered to be anti-freedom.

The result is a new game with winners and losers, but no clear consensus on the rules. Money, which can only be a means to an end, has been proclaimed as an end in itself. The tragic life of Howard Hughes is a kind of parable of the results of worshipping idols of gold. One of the richest men in the world, he became increasingly isolated and paranoid and died miserably, probably of starvation. One of the Rockefeller dynasty was once asked by a journalist, "How much money is enough?" He replied, "Just a little bit more."

In the end, our freedom is very much about living up to our deepest values. Society no longer tells us so clearly what these should be so we often have to discover them for ourselves, which can be hard work. Without values it is too easy to dissipate our lives in pursuing short-term pleasures. Even if we know what we value, there is still the problem of overcoming the inner compulsions which may pull us in a different direction, no matter how hard we try. There are no easy answers, only the silent mystery which Christians call "Grace" and which others do not name but simply experience.

Mike Lowe, UK

A
song
of
a
morning
bird

touched
the
very

very
strings
of

my
soul

I
pain
did
feel

a
hurt
of
a
sort

Why
I
questioned

why
hurt
do
I
feel

instead
of
a
rejoice

Life
rubbed
against
life

A
string
touched
another
string

The
touch
of
a
life
by
another

Why
was
I
hurt

by
a
touch

"Because"
my
heart
answered

"you
were
reminded
that

many
in
this
world

are

out

of

touch"

arts expressed
by Zoe Peterssen

Photo: Peter Sisam

Scattered Thoughts

My mother said to me, 'If you become a soldier you will be a general; if you become a monk you will be a Pope.' Instead, I became a painter and wound up as Picasso. - Pablo Picasso.

The truth is kind even if it is painful.

My interest is in the future, because I am going to spend the rest of my life there.

Macho doesn't prove mucho.

People before things.

Trust, the highest form of prayer.

Peace is not just an idea. It is all of us deciding to live differently.

Never expect to be loved for what you stand for. Expect opposition!

Feelings are the real facts.

The good things in life are not to be had singly but come to us with a mixture.

